VANITY FAIR

FROM THE MAGAZINE

Keeping Up With the Millers: Stephen Miller and His Wife, Katie, Found Love in a Hateful Place

Trump's favorite young power couple—after Jared and Ivanka and Don Jr. and Kimberly, that is—have carved out a special place in the administration for their rhetoric and ideology.

BY EVGENIA PERETZ

AUGUST 13, 2020

ILLUSTRATION BY PHILIP BURKE.

It was a Sunday in mid-February at the Trump International Hotel. The whole gang was there: **Mick Mulvaney, Reince Priebus, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, Mike Pence**, and yes, the Big Man himself. POTUS had flown in from Daytona Beach just in time for the party, hilariously complaining in his toast about having been inconvenienced by the groom, **Stephen Miller**: "He is the only one who could have a damn wedding in the middle of Presidents' Day weekend. I'm sure it didn't affect anybody here." The rabbi was an adviser to the ambassador to Israel, and there was an Elvis impersonator. This may not have been every girl's dream wedding, but for the bride, **Katie Waldman**, it was perfect. Stephen, 34, and Katie, 28, had fallen in love—as young people do—while figuring out how to separate children from their parents at the border. Now, thanks to Katie, Stephen was officially off the market. It didn't throw her that half the country was blasting him as a white nationalist due to a recent cache of leaked emails, or that one chunk of his family had disowned him. No, this was the "perfect day," Katie tweeted, and Stephen Miller, "the perfect man."

To those in the public who didn't know much about the bride, the whole thing was amazing. Not only had Stephen found a human woman to marry, but Katie, as the pictures showed, was *pretty*, with a warm, vivacious smile. Stephen, by contrast, cut a villainous figure. Cartoonishly so, like Mr. Burns from *The Simpsons*—with an orb-like forehead, funneling into a long, pale face; mistrusting, soulless eyes; and a petulant lower lip. Rarely has a face been such an apt illustration of the person inside.

As the president's most determined, unwavering adviser on any single topic, he has crafted, with considerable success, the most punishing immigration policies in modern U.S. history—from the Muslim ban to the family-separation policy and every measure in between. He has been the draftsman behind **Trump**'s darkest rhetoric. Unlike so many other White House officials who resigned or were pushed out, he has not only survived, he's thrived. Protecting America from immigrants has been his single passion. "This is all I care about," he told colleagues last year. "I don't have a family. I don't have anything else. This is my life." And now Stephen, who had gone without romance most of his life, had found love.

> **The Millers' respective issues dovetail in a single phenomenon: harm to immigrant communities and people of color.**

But to those who knew Waldman, the union wasn't surprising. As a college classmate from the University of Florida puts it, "The only thing she loves or values in this world is power. Anyone she attaches to in her life is simply a pawn to feed her addiction to it." After all, even Goebbels was a ladies' man. Accounts from her high school and college years bring into focus a woman with charm and energy—she had YOLO tattooed inside her lower lip—but it was always trained toward power. These people recall how Waldman cut corners, employed dirty, even illegal tricks, and laughed as she got away with it. Accounts from more recent colleagues add detail to the portrait—one not of a counterbalance to Miller, but rather of a powerful reinforcement. A Washington media flack who's rapidly ascended—from Capitol Hill to the Department of Homeland Security to the vice president's office—she can display a bright, even friendly manner, but behind the scenes, acquaintances say she can be ruthless and underhanded, and at times has seemed callous about the suffering of others.

In some way, Mr. and Mrs. Miller are emblematic of young Washington, circa Trump: arrogant and gleefully pugnacious. They have few close friends outside the administration. They don't hang out much in public because they tend to get harassed. They recently traded D.C. for the more secluded Arlington, Virginia. Outside of **Jared** and **Ivanka**, and **Don Jr**. and **Kimberly Guilfoyle**, they are perhaps the city's most powerful couple under 50. Their influence reaches beyond immigration policy into the two most pressing issues of the day: civil unrest around systemic racism, and the pandemic. He plays a key role in Trump's messaging, decrying the removal of Confederate monuments and the threats to American "heritage." She, as the spokesperson for the White House Coronavirus Task Force, is a poster child for its disastrously bungled response. The Millers' respective issues dovetail in a single phenomenon: harm to immigrant communities and people of color. And given the new couple's knack for pulling the levers of power, and the Trump administration's control over the judicial and legislative branches, they may be with us for a long time to come.

The tale of how they found each other begins in the late 1990s, on opposite coasts, but in similar environments—Stephen in Santa Monica and Katie in Weston, Florida, just outside of Fort Lauderdale. Both cities were liberal enclaves. Both areas were seeing an upsurge in immigration from Latin America, contributing to the "browning of America." Mexicans were coming into California, while Venezuelans were finding a haven in Weston, earning the town the nickname "Westonzuela." Both Stephen and Katie were from affluent Jewish families, both were middle children. Both had fiscally conservative lawyer fathers (Stephen's father, Michael, later moved into real estate), yet they each have plenty of left-leaning relatives.

While Katie was still in grade school, 13-year-old Stephen's worldview began to take shape. The first spark was his discovery in middle school of *Guns & Ammo* magazine, which led him to **Wayne LaPierre**'s *Guns, Crime, and Freedom*, which led him to conclude that American culture was under assault from outsiders. He had a close friend at the time, **Jason Islas**, a Mexican-American, who says Stephen called him one day to end their friendship because of Jason's heritage. When Miller entered Santa Monica High, an ethnically diverse public school, he found culprits everywhere—new immigrants, Latin Americans, and all the white liberals who coddled and celebrated them.

To call it out loudly and offensively was his thing. In the superb, deeply revelatory new book *Hatemonger*, journalist **Jean Guerrero** chronicles how, beginning in high school, Miller systematically tried to humiliate any foreign group that appeared to be intruding into his world or asking for special treatment. She reports, for example, how he targeted the Chicano Student Movement of Aztlán (MEChA), telling the group's local president, **Maria Vivanco**, to "speak only English," and taunting new immigrants who struggled with English. When a school counselor, **Oscar de la Torre**, chaired a community meeting on providing opportunities for minorities, Miller attended so he could deliver his own message: that the school was excusing Black and Hispanic misbehavior by holding those students to a lower standard. The teenager held forth like a know-it-all, lecturing him that racism didn't exist. No matter, notes Guerrero, that a decade earlier de la Torre had been the recipient of a hate letter, sent to hundreds of Latino families in Santa Monica, that called Mexicans "brown animals" and threatened to gas them like "Hitler gassed the Jews."

Miller relished being a shocking pest and provocateur. In 2002 he ran for student speaker of the house. In a story that's seared into the memories of his schoolmates, he stood onstage and told the audience, smirking, "Am I the only one who is sick and tired of being told to pick up my trash when we have plenty of janitors *to do it for us*?!" The students went nuts in their disgust, and he loved it. It seemed to fellow students his goal was to get people to hate him. He reveled in imagery of gruesome violence. In a video of Miller on a school bus, he jokes about Saddam Hussein, suggesting he and his cronies get their fingers cut off because "torture is a celebration of life."

Miller fed his views by obsessively listening to local right-wing radio host **Larry Elder**, a charismatic African American who believes that Black people are more racist than white and are responsible for their own failures. When the terrorist attacks of 9/11 happened, Miller saw what he believed to be a scandalous siding with the enemy among his peers and teachers. He called into Elder's show and complained about his school's lack of patriotism. Elder, who became his first mentor, invited Miller onto the show over and over, 69 times total, to decry the destruction of America by foreigners everywhere.

Miller's uncle, **David Glosser**, who was then close to his sister **Miriam**, Stephen's mother, and saw the family regularly, became alarmed by his nephew's words. "I thought it was a case of early adolescent insanity," recalls Glosser, a retired neuropsychologist. But his parents seemed receptive to their son, says Glosser, adding that Stephen's father, **Michael**, was becoming more right-wing, more politically aggrieved, as the government placed restrictions on his real estate business. Likewise, Miriam, who'd been a social worker, became more conservative as she joined her husband's business. When their teenage son found a presence on right-wing radio, says Glosser, the parents "were thrilled and tickled."

> **In a video of Miller on a school bus, he jokes about Saddam Hussein, suggesting he and his cronies get their fingers cut off because "torture is a celebration of life."**

Miller's appearances on *The Larry Elder Show* caught the attention of his next mentor, firebrand **David Horowitz**, an ex-leftist who was at that point running a think tank devoted to combatting the left's alleged war on American culture and white people. Horowitz took Miller under his wing, inculcating him with the language of counterrevolution.

Miller entered Duke in 2003 and seems to have tried out a new persona—Libertarian Lounge Lizard. Dorm mates recall him slinking around in a bathrobe and slippers, smoking Nat Sherman cigarettes. Because he was prematurely balding and looked older, the girls on his floor found him useful for buying alcohol. Miller obliged. "He'd put on a suit, then go to the liquor store and they wouldn't card him," says one of his dorm mates. Deep down, he seemed to desire female affection. He found some—as Guerrero uncovers—with a Mexican-American girl from a Texas border town, whom we'll call Sara.

Their courtship would be rich material for a social scientist. A source close to Sara says she found him intelligent, but mainly she felt sorry for him, as he didn't have many friends. He was not opposed to immigrants, he told her, just *illegal* immigrants, which is why she even gave him a chance. But he wanted more from her than she from him. Sometimes she let him in; sometimes she'd try to shake him. "She'd just say, 'Go away, Stephen,' in that mean-girl way," says a friend of Sara's who suspects she was embarrassed to be seen with him in public. But he could lash back. The friend recalls that when Sara spoke Spanish, he'd cut her off, telling her, "You should just speak English." It went on

this way for much of their freshman year, until she returned home. He called her a few times over the following summer but she never called him back, and she never returned for their sophomore year. Sara's friends, seeing his anti-immigrant stance explode over the years, later wondered to one another, "Man, how bad did *she* hurt *him*?"

With Sara gone, Miller returned to his old passions, like hating janitors. As Guerrero reports in *Hatemonger*, he leaned into this particular bit, telling aghast classmates after meals to leave their messes because "we have people for that." He found a fresh target in the Palestine Solidarity Movement, an activist group on campus. Just as he had complained about Santa Monica High on *The Larry Elder Show* a couple years earlier, so now he called into the show to attack Duke. Terrorists were recruiting members from campus, he claimed, and Duke was doing nothing about it. He landed a column, called Miller Time, in the school newspaper, *The Chronicle*, in which he set his sights on the same bogeymen: multiculturalism, affirmative action, the war on Christmas, et cetera. He invited Horowitz to speak at Duke and relished all the shouting it elicited from the audience.

> **The texts and arguments that Brimelow offered about the supremacy of the white race sharpened Miller's focus. This, he realized, was his calling.**

"I cannot remember a single person who was his friend," says **Seyward Darby**, an editor at *The Chronicle*, who now edits *The Atavist*. "Nor can anyone I know." She recalls his weird Facebook profile. "It was populated with staged black-and-white photos of him in cowboy gear, on a lonely ranch-like landscape. He cultivated this air of being apart—or above?—the campus fray. It always felt to me that, to a strangely large degree, he enjoyed being despised. Or at least being perplexing to people. One could only hope his persona amounted to juvenile performance art, that he didn't really believe everything he wrote and said and that he would grow out of thinking that being provocative and alienating made him interesting."

Instead, he became more ideologically entrenched, and his ideas took a darker turn. In his senior year, he organized an immigration debate with **Richard Spencer**, a Duke graduate student at the time, who'd go on to found the alt-right movement and become America's most prominent white supremacist. One of the speakers was white nationalist **Peter Brimelow**, author of *Alien Nation* and founder of the website VDare, named after Virginia Dare, the first child born to British settlers. The texts and arguments that Brimelow offered about the supremacy of the white race sharpened Miller's focus. This, he realized, was his calling.

Down in Weston, Florida, at Cypress Bay High School, his soulmate was coming of age. Like Santa Monica High School, Cypress Bay was a public school, with a lot of liberal Jews and Latinos. It was not her scene. "She gave off American Heritage vibes," says her classmate **Emmi Weiner**, referring to the private school in the nearby town of Plantation. One source told me that if I managed to find a single high school friend of hers I should "get a Pulitzer Prize." In Waldman's first foray into communications, she joined the school newspaper, *The Circuit*. The students on the paper were feisty and competitive, brimming with ideas—so much so that MTV did a reality show on the paper during that time. Yet Waldman hung back. "I never saw her take any initiative to do anything that would benefit the newspaper program," says fellow newspaper alum **Cassia Laham.** "It always seemed like she was doing whatever it took to get by."

In 12th grade AP English, she found a way to stand out. Her teacher was **Simone Waite**, a revered educator and one of the few African American faculty members at the school, which had a Black student population of just 4%. Waite was teaching Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, which she had done many times before, and gave them some historical background, including about slavery. "One of the many things it did was that it took away our history," she told the class. Waldman didn't like that, and asked, "Couldn't they just tell each other about their history?" Waite explained that it wasn't that easy. They went back and forth, but Waldman wouldn't let it go. Seeing that they were in a rut, Waite told her that they should agree to disagree and move on with the lesson.

> **"I hesitate to say this, but it was about race. 'Here is a Black woman teaching me this novel by another Black woman, and saying things that I definitely do not agree with politically.'"**

Waldman stopped coming to class and promptly drafted a petition, calling out Waite for being "psychologically damaging" and "sickening," as the teacher recalls. Waite heard about it from a student, and was confused and devastated. The student assured her that no one agreed with Waldman. Waite eventually met with Waldman and her father, Glenn. After hearing both sides, Waldman's father concluded, according to Waite, that "this teacher is extremely well-liked," and that the best course of action would be to take Waldman out of her class.

Waite struggled not to take it personally, and eventually came to a realization. "I hesitate to say this, but it was about race. 'Here is a Black woman teaching me this novel by another Black woman, and saying things that I definitely do not agree with politically,'" Waite posits. "She did whatever was in her power to show something. It just didn't work." There were aftershocks. Waldman was in two classes with Waite's daughter, **Alexandra**, who was often the only Black kid in the class. Even after publicly trying to take down her mother, Waldman would text Alexandra to ask for homework help, as if nothing had happened. Alexandra and her mother didn't know what to think. Alexandra and Katie weren't friends. There were plenty of other kids to ask. It struck Waite as another kind of power play. Alexandra did her best to ignore Katie.

Waldman hit her stride at the University of Florida, her father's alma mater. She immediately joined a sorority, Alpha Omicron Pi (AOII), which put her among other privileged white girls. Minority students were largely siloed into their own groups—the Black Student Union, the Hispanic Student Association, the Asian American Student Union. Waldman partied with the rich frat boys from Tau Epsilon Phi, and drove around campus in her Lexus SUV. "She thought she was the shit," says a classmate.

As everyone at UF knew, the key to influence lay in student government, which laid out a direct path to the elite Florida Blue Key society and from there, straight into Florida politics. Fraternities and sororities control this system, which many alums believe is structurally corrupt, as it's built on trading positions and the buying of votes. Effectively, only students from the Greek houses, who were predominantly white, could become student body presidents, while Black students, with a few exceptions, could only hope to be vice presidents or treasurers. Waldman joined the dominant party, called Unite.

"From day one, she wanted to associate herself with whatever existing power structure there was," says **Dave Schneider**, a member of the opposing Progress party, who served in the student senate with her. He recalls stirrings of racial tension within student government, and her memorable role. In the wake of Trayvon Martin's killing, a Black senator from Waldman's Unite party put forth a resolution to send condolences from UF students to Martin's parents. Waldman successfully voted to table it.

But mainly, student government wasn't about political ideas. It was about power. And in pursuit of that, she was a loyal worker bee. **Ben Meyers**, student body president of the Unite party, recalls, "She worked very hard for me when I was getting elected. She was very articulate, on the rise…. The fact that she's affiliated with [Trump] makes me proud to know her." But she was also ruthless. **Ford Dwyer**, then the president of the independent Students Party, recalls campaigning at the Greek houses, which was routine. But when he got to AOII, Katie stood in the doorway and wouldn't let him enter. "It was her life," Dwyer says. "Some of her friends told me it was the *only* thing in her life." Indeed, according to a former classmate, this thirst spilled over into friendships. If she believed you could confer power or status, "She would make you think that she'd take a bullet for you, that no price is too high. She would attack and victimize your enemies," says this classmate.

But her political will began to tilt toward the unethical. In February of 2012, something unexpected was happening at UF. Two days before the election, a popular football coach had endorsed a student-football player, a member of the independent party, on the front page of the college newspaper, *The Alligator*. This was a five-alarm fire to the Unite students. The day before the election, Waldman and senate president **Jason Tiemeier** stole 268 copies of the newspaper from a stand on campus and threw them into the garbage. When another student spotted them and reported it to the paper, the campus police got involved.

Waldman denied it. "She dug in her heels," recalls Dwyer. "She thought the newspaper had wronged her for even reporting it." But a few weeks later, Tiemeier came clean in a column in *The Alligator* and apologized. He outed Waldman as his partner. Cornered, Waldman lashed out, claiming that at the time she had told Tiemeier not to steal the papers. In the wake of the incident, an *Alligator* column called for Waldman's resignation, to no avail. Her close friend, **Christina Bonnarigo**, the Unite party's spokesperson, stated that it was not Waldman's duty to stop the criminal action, and that Waldman "did all that she was required to do." Waldman was promoted to the position of budget and allocations chairwoman. According to a classmate, Waldman laughed about the whole episode—"she wore it as a badge of honor." **Cassia Laham**, her high school classmate who was now at UF, could only shake her head. "The thing with Katie, bad behavior always got rewarded." The Unite party was so tarnished by the episode that it disbanded and reformed under another name. But Katie went on her merry way. After graduating in 2014, she landed a job in Washington as a press assistant for the National Republican Senatorial Committee.

By this time, Miller had moved along from his role as press secretary for Minnesota congresswoman **Michele Bachmann**—a job Horowitz had helped secure—and was now communications director for Alabama senator **Jeff Sessions**, a staunch immigration opponent, the perfect ideological match. Miller worked the phones with reporters, in constant attack dog mode. In the spring of 2013, a bipartisan group of senators, known as the Gang of Eight, had come up with a bill that offered increased border security in exchange for a path toward

citizenship, a repellent idea to Miller and his boss. Miller called Hill reporters and others around the clock to bludgeon it. Thanks in part to his lobbying, the bill died.

He was living comfortably, in a $1 million apartment that his parents bought him in the CityCenter, a condo and shopping complex featuring stores like Gucci and Hermès. But he was still single, and apparently not loving it. As his uncle David Glosser recalls, during a Thanksgiving over that period, Stephen's parents asked him whether he had met any nice girls. "He exploded at the table, saying the subject was completely off-limits. They backed off."

He *did* catch the eye of someone, though—a disheveled older gentleman named **Steve Bannon**. The CEO of Breitbart knew of Miller's work with Bachmann and Sessions and remembered the kid from *The Larry Elder Show*. He eagerly brought him into the fold, where Miller practically became part of the staff, crafting the website's alt-right platform. He filled young reporters' inboxes with white nationalist fare from VDare and American Renaissance, and encouraged them to read the 1973 novel *The Camp of the Saints*, a neo-Nazi favorite about a group of feces-eating Indian refugees who overrun Europe. Presumably aware that this wasn't a good look, he kept his passion for such literature hidden from public view.

At the same time, Bannon was building Candidate Donald Trump. When Trump announced his run at Trump Tower—famously claiming that Mexico was sending rapists to America as its "dumping ground"—Miller felt a thrill. He later told the *Washington Post*, "Everything that I felt at the deepest levels of my heart were now being expressed by a candidate for our nation's highest office before a watching world." At Bannon's suggestion, the Trump campaign offered the young man the opportunity of a lifetime—to come onto Trump's campaign as a speechwriter and adviser. As an added bonus for Miller's parents, this meant a new pool of women who might like him. Miriam had joked to her cousin **Patti Glosser**, with whom she was especially close, "I'm putting you in charge of finding him a nice Jewish girl." Now, according to Patti, "Miriam said, 'Well, maybe Ivanka can do it.' She was excited by the whole hoopla."

He *did* catch the eye of someone, though—a disheveled older gentleman named Steve Bannon.

On a team filled with unpleasant people, Miller fit right in. "He was just a dick," says a former campaign official. "Very territorial, not warm, just *bleh*." The national spotlight emboldened his rhetoric. In television appearances, he delivered "fact"-filled diatribes in an air-hogging monotone. He made outrageous claims, like that immigration would lead to mass female genital mutilation. He worked similarly vivid bombast into Trump's speeches—about immigrants who "stomp on their victims," "slash them with machetes"—and into his own warm-up act, which he performed before the crowds at rallies.

At one such event in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, where the Glosser branch of his family is from, Miller talked about the town's former glory, and invoked the names of his relatives, Izzy and Sam. David Glosser, hearing the names of his beloved father and grandfather used in connection to Stephen's vitriol, could stay silent no longer. He posted on the Johnstown newspaper's Facebook page: "If in the early 20th Century, the USA had built a wall against poor, desperate immigrants of a different religion, like the Glossers, all of us would have gone up the crematoria chimneys with the six million other kinsmen." Glosser says he received an "avalanche of support" from Glossers everywhere, even ones he'd never heard of. Alas, Stephen's mother, Miriam, "wasn't enthusiastic about [the post], to say the least," says Glosser.

And then Trump got elected. Miller was no longer an acolyte. He had ascended. Days after the inauguration, Miller and Bannon crafted the executive order banning travel from seven majority-Muslim countries, with no guidance for how to implement it. Chaos and confusion erupted at the airports and around the country—and that was the point. Miller wanted the public to know that America was not what people thought it was. The words on the Statue of Liberty—"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free"—weren't meant to be there, he told America. Furthermore, none of this was up for debate. As he announced, "The whole world will soon see as we begin to take further actions that the powers of the president to protect our country are very substantial and will not be questioned."

Waldman, meanwhile, had become press secretary for Montana senator **Steve Daines**. Though Daines praised her "very strong personality" and "incredible work ethic," *Montana Post* editor **Don Pogreba** recalls an approach that was immature and pedantic. When he tweeted that a congressional bill to get rid of Obamacare could kill 25,000 people, she scolded him for his "dangerous rhetoric" and tweeted back, "Where in the bill does it say that? Point me to that bill text." She moved on to bigger things. In late 2017 she landed a job in communications at the Department of Homeland Security, just before **Kirstjen Nielsen** took over as secretary. Among its roles, the department oversaw the security of the Southern border—Stephen Miller's life obsession.

By 2018 migrants from Central America were approaching the border by the tens of thousands. From his perspective, the only way to deter people from coming to the border would be for them to see families suffer as vividly as possible. Miller just needed to wrest control away from DHS. For several months, working with the heads of ICE and border security, he tried to get Nielsen to sign off on a zero-tolerance memo—which would effectively lead to family separation. "Stephen was particularly trying to insert himself into the communications shop," says a former DHS official. "He had this thing about calling everyone and trying to get the answer he wanted." He found that person in Katie Waldman.

Did Katie see Stephen as the Sebastian Valmont of the Trump set? It's unclear. What was clear was that Waldman became a virtual extension of Miller's team. The story lines she shared with the press might have come directly from his mouth. Migrants, she said, were "violent mobs." The caravans, she told Fox's **Brian Kilmeade**, were publicity stunts. After a few months of holding off, Nielsen effectively signed family separation into policy. According to the new book *Separated*, by MSNBC's **Jacob Soboroff**, Waldman told him that the intention of putting children in cages was to shock—just as Miller had said. She took a number of trips to the border, which she chronicled on Instagram: Katie, wearing a black T-shirt and sunglasses, grinning, with the caption, "living my best life at the border wall." As she later told Soboroff, "DHS sent me to the border to see the separations for myself—to try to make me more compassionate, but it didn't work." The admission didn't surprise college classmates I spoke with; one says that "I genuinely believe there's something wrong with her. She lacks a moral compass and [demonstrates] elements of a sociopath." When pressed by Soboroff as to whether she was a white nationalist, she said no, but that immigrants should assimilate. "Why do we need to have Little Havana?" she mused.

The images of children in cages, the audio of toddlers wailing for their mothers and fathers, made their way around the world. Members of Miller's extended family wrung their hands in collective despair at how such a man could have emerged from the family line. Patti had written several letters to Miriam over the years, but never sent them. Now, she did. "I said, 'Your father would be ashamed…. Please tell me that you don't agree with this. Please tell me that you don't, Miriam.' And she never responded to me." Stephen's childhood rabbi, **Neil Comess-Daniels**, powerfully rebuked him in a sermon.

From the Archive: *Stephen Miller's White Rage* →

Family separation was a PR disaster. In June 2018, at the urging of the first lady and Ivanka, Trump signed an executive order officially cancelling the policy, though he still wanted to enforce it, according to reports. Miller and Waldman looked for ways to reinstate it under a different name, which alarmed her colleagues. The next month, the Senate would hold a hearing about family separation. Among the officials being questioned was Commander **Jonathan White**, who was in charge of those efforts at HHS. As Soboroff recounts, in a practice session for the hearing, White was asked if separation would be harmful to children's mental health. Waldman wanted him to respond that there was no way to know. White said he would stick to the facts, thank you. Waldman went at him, calling him a "bleeding-heart liberal." He exploded at her, "You literally traumatized these kids. Why don't you peddle your story to people who don't work in immigration."

The truth soon came out. Miller and Waldman weren't just ideological partners over the course of this period. They had been falling in love—a fact she was keeping from colleagues, especially Nielsen. According to a friend, she had wanted to find a Jewish partner, but the pool of Republican Jews in Washington was small. The courtship would have been uncomfortable to most people, says this friend. Everywhere they went, people hated on him. They would go out for dinner, and strangers from the next table would ask how she stomached him.

But Katie—who by February 2019 was working as Senator **Martha McSally**'s spokeswoman— seemed giddy about her new life alongside Miller. Together, they were the Mr. and Mrs. Smith of MAGA, working to purge her former department of those who'd stood in the way of Miller's policies. In March 2019, Katie showed up at Nielsen's practice session before she was to testify before Congress; the interpretation was that she was there to be his eyes and ears. Nielsen was forced out a month later. Katie's former DHS colleagues believed that she was the source behind a *Washington Examiner* article about the imminent firing of two more DHS officials whom Miller was targeting—which was news to those officials. Those officials found the source's statements to be rife with gross distortions and falsehoods. It seems his power was exhilarating to her. At a wedding of a college friend, a guest recalls how she was breezed in and out with perfunctory niceties, excused Stephen's absence, and "bragged about how he hadn't flown commercial in years." A college classmate jokes, "I would guess she reads news coverage of him as foreplay." She moved up the career ladder beside him. In October 2019, she landed the plum job of Pence's press secretary.

A month later, Katie and Stephen announced their engagement. According to a relative, members of Katie's own clan were distressed by the union. Extended Waldman family members shared their concern with Katie's parents. As much as her parents might have

preferred a different son-in-law, they felt it was not their decision to make. Katie assured people that there was a different side to him, that he was kind and caring. When this relative met Miller, that other side was not apparent.

As Waldman and Miller exchanged vows that perfect February day, COVID-19 was spreading unchecked throughout the country. Pence was about to be tapped to lead the Coronavirus Task Force. To be sure, Trump set the ignorant, anti-science tone. Katie, by virtue of being the task force's press secretary, might have tried to steer the messaging in a more responsible, informed direction. Instead, she seemed to be a blithe minion. At an early press conference, **Deborah Birx**, FDA head **Stephen Hahn**, and Surgeon General **Jerome Adams** had arranged themselves on the stage, about 10 feet apart from one another. Katie emerged from backstage and, with an insistent smile, motioned for them to get closer…closer…closer. The officials did as they were told.

The public is desperate for real information, but Katie has seemed content to treat members of the press like Trump did—as annoying, rude nuisances. At a press conference in early March, reporter **Brian Karem** asked Pence if the White House had any guidance for the uninsured getting tested for COVID-19. Pence ignored the question and rambled on about how the risk to Americans was low. As the task force moved to exit the room, Karem tried to ask his question again, and then a third time, his voice rising to a yell, in exasperation. Katie snapped, "Screaming for the camera isn't going to get you anywhere." Karem wasn't especially surprised. A veteran of many administrations, he'd long felt that the Trump press people were the worst: "Juvenile…arrogant…so incomplete in their knowledge they have no idea they even lack knowledge," and that "she embodies all of that." What offended him was the obvious callousness toward American people suffering. "This administration doesn't care, and it's obvious from her response to me that there's little consideration for anyone outside their own bubble."

> **Together, they were the Mr. and Mrs. Smith of MAGA, working to purge her former department of those who'd stood in the way of Miller's policies.**

Weeks later when Pence was delivering PPE to a rehab facility in Alexandria, Virginia, she stood talking to a group of reporters. They wore masks, but Katie did not. She was well aware of the controversy. The previous week, Pence hadn't worn a mask to the Mayo Clinic and was promptly shamed into admitting that he should have. As **Debra J. Saunders** of *Las Vegas Review-Journal* later reported, Katie had coughed then joked to them that she didn't have the coronavirus. The next day, Katie tested positive for the virus. Trump let it slip that a wonderful woman in his administration, "Katie," had tested positive, leaving it to reporters to figure out who exactly it was. Mrs. Miller emerged a few weeks later to thank well-wishers and to announce that she was pregnant.

Seven months into the virus, the messaging from the task force has been catastrophic. More than 160,000 Americans have died, a toll exacerbated by the administration's misinformation and lack of concern; the plague has disproportionately hit people of color and, of course, the elderly. Among the recent victims is Stephen's own grandmother, Ruth Glosser, who died in early July. Her son, David Glosser, castigates the administration for its disastrous response to the coronavirus. The White House has denied that COVID-19 was the cause of her death, even though it is on the death certificate. Even while downplaying COVID-19, Stephen has used the disease as a tool for his xenophobia. After calling it the "foreign virus" in Trump's March Oval Office address, he has used it to curb immigration in every new way he can. On Monday the *New York Times* reported that Trump is considering blocking U.S. citizens from reentering the country if border officials suspect COVID-19 exposure; the report attributed the push to Miller's "assault on immigration."

Miller has seized the messaging of the other national crisis—the civil unrest stemming from the murder of George Floyd. The target has shifted from immigrants to the supporters of Black Lives Matter, but the rhetorical flourishes are the same. "Our nation is witnessing a merciless campaign to wipe out our history, defame our heroes, erase our values, and indoctrinate our children," Miller wrote in Trump's Mount Rushmore speech, words that by now sound like white noise. Once intent on taking control of DHS, Miller is watching his fantasies of punishment unfold on television, with militiamen in camouflage—whom he calls "heroes"—pulling protesters off the street and throwing them into unmarked vans.

These may be the Millers' final days this close to the sun. But for some of his family members, even a Trump defeat won't end the nightmare. "I personally believe that he should be tried for crimes against humanity," says Patti Glosser of her young relative. Katie could easily find herself at a place like Fox, a new **Irena Briganti**. Stephen will likely find a role at a far-right think tank or a Breitbart-like corner of the web. The worry among his relatives is that Stephen has laid the groundwork for longevity. "When he's in his 60s or 70s or even sooner, we could go through this all over again," fears Patti. "Will we become a kinder, gentler nation, or will we continue on the path that we are?"

This story has been updated.

All products featured on Vanity Fair *are independently selected by our editors. However, when you buy something through our retail links, we may earn an affiliate commission.*

More Great Stories From *Vanity Fair*

— How Jared Kushner's Secret Coronavirus Testing Plan "Went Poof Into Thin Air"
— Why Trump's Black Lives Matter Protest Response Could Cost Him 2020
— Behind the Scenes of the NBA's Dystopian COVID-Free Bubble
— Experts Worry Trump's DHS Crackdowns Ignore the Real Threat
— How Carlos Ghosn Escaped Japan, According to the Ex-Soldier Who Snuck Him Out
— Former Pandemic Officials Call Trump's Coronavirus Response a National Disaster
— From the Archive: The Untold Story of Dallas's Heroic Ebola Response

Looking for more? Sign up for our daily Hive newsletter and never miss a story.

EVGENIA PERETZ

Evgenia Peretz has been a contributing editor at *Vanity Fair* since 1999, covering a wide range of topics. She has written extensively about politics, with subjects including the Florida recount and the run-up to the war in Iraq. Her article about President Bush's presence in Texas, "High Noon in Crawford," … Read More

READ MORE

POLITICS

"The Kind of Event I Was Warning About": Charlie Kirk and Our Era of Political...

As belligerent rhetoric takes over political discourse, experts raise alarms about the risk of further bloodshed.

POLITICS

How Charlie Kirk Used Controversy—Often Delivered in Person—to Construct Our...

With his relentless approach and online inescapability, the young conservative movement leader built a culture-war behemoth.

POLITICS

Charlie Kirk, Redeemed: A Political Class Finds Its Lost Cause

By ignoring the rhetoric and actions of the Turning Point USA founder, pundits and politicians are sanitizing his legacy.

POLITICS

Turning Point USA Will Be "Bigger Than Ever": Inside the Charlie Kirk Memorial Service

Mourners had gathered outside State Farm Stadium in Glendale, Arizona by 4 a.m. to pay their respects to Turning Point USA founder Charlie Kirk.

POLITICS

POLITICS

POLITICS

STYLE

At Charlie Kirk's Funeral, "The Power of Martyrdom" and "a Righteous Fury" Were on...

At most every turn, the service made an explicitly religious appeal, positioning Charlie Kirk as more potent a Christian advocate in death than in life.

How Long Can Jerome Powell Hang On to the Worst Job in Washington?

Trump fired one of the Fed chair's colleagues this week.

"This Is Going to Radicalize Millions of Americans": Young MAGA Plots a Future After...

With increased security and hardened commitment, a generation of conservative activists promises to carry the torch passed by their leader's assassination.

Charlie Kirk's Favorite Influencers Have a Shared Message: Go to Church

Christian conservatives believe Kirk's death is a sign that the "devil has overplayed his hand"—and that it will jump-start a religious revival.

POLITICS

How Erika Kirk Rose to Power

In her marriage to Charlie Kirk, Erika Kirk played the supporting role of "submissive" spouse. Now, as she prepares for her husband's funeral this Sunday—and takes over his Super PAC—all eyes are on her.

TELEVISION

Jimmy Kimmel Doesn't Spare Trump As He Returns to ABC

"He tried his best to cancel me," said Kimmel in his first monologue since his suspension. "Instead, he forced millions of people to watch the show. That backfired bigly."

NEWS

With Summer Almost Over, the Hamptons' Largely Immigrant Workforce Worries About ICE...

A Sag Harbor spa. An East Hampton market. Workers at the most exclusive oases on Long Island face the consequences of a nationwide deportation effort as their busiest season winds down.

NEWS

On Fox News, Where Charlie Kirk Was a Frequent Presence, Anchors Processed His Death ...

In the immediate aftermath of the shooting, network personalities, many of whom knew Kirk as friend or media ally, dealt with the news as they delivered it.